



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

CRITICISMS AND DISCUSSIONS.

THE PRIMITIVE AND THE MODERN CONCEPTIONS OF PERSONAL IMMORTALITY.

In an interesting review of my recent book (*The Beliefs in God and Immortality: an Anthropological, Psychological, and Statistical Study*) in the April number of this journal, it is inadvertently written that the book is "simply a statistical investigation." This statement is true of Part II only. It is not applicable to Part I, for it treats exclusively of "The two conceptions of immortality: their origins, their different characteristics, and the attempted demonstration of the truth of the modern conception." No more does the statement apply to Part III, which discusses "The present utility of the beliefs in personal immortality and in a personal God."

In the first half of the present paper, I set forth very briefly that which I consider the main contribution contained in Part I of my book. In the second half, I give some information concerning the statistics (Part II). J. H. L.

A curious contradiction seems to exist with regard to the origin of the belief in survival after death. It is authoritatively affirmed by anthropologists that that belief is to be found in every tribe now extant. Frazer, less dogmatic, writes that "it might be hard to point to a single tribe of men, however savage, of whom one could say with certainty that the faith is totally wanting among them."¹ And yet historians no less competent in their field than the anthropologists to whom we refer state with disconcerting unanimity that the belief in immortality appeared late among the people from whom Europe drew its civilization. We are told, for instance, that the Israelites' belief in immortality cannot be traced much further back than the beginning of the Christian era. The covenant Yahveh made with his people does not allude to a future life. The nation alone was an object of his care. The great prophets them-

¹J. G. Frazer, *The Belief in Immortality*, pp. 25, 33.

selves, when they inveigh against sin, care only for the danger therefrom to the existence of the nation. Among the Greeks also the belief in immortality is said to have appeared late. Pythagoras, the Mysteries, and Plato are named as marking the rise of the faith. Of the Romans, Carter says that they did not have the idea of a personal soul: "It was not present at the time of the Punic wars. We see only scanty traces of it in the literature of the Ciceronean age."²

These apparently contradictory affirmations may be explained in two ways: either the particular survival-idea expressed in the belief in ghosts, universal among primitive people, had at the beginning of the historical period disappeared from among the nations just mentioned; or the immortality which the historians of these nations have in mind is so different from the primary conception of continuation after death that they disregard that belief.

The first of these two suppositions is not tenable. When the historical period opens, a belief in survival was incontrovertibly present among the peoples of whom the historians we have quoted speak. In the Old Testament traces of polydemonistic belief are definite enough to preclude divergence of opinion. The evidence is just as clear in the case of the Greeks and of the Jews. The Homeric conception of man is of a dual personality composed of a visible earthly being and of its shadow or copy, which manifests its presence in dreams and continues to live in Hades after the severance of death. Jane Harrison has conclusively demonstrated that while the religion of the Olympic gods was in process of formation, and even much later, the Greeks practised rites clearly indicative of the belief in human ghosts.³

The idea of *manes*, essential to the religion of the old Romans, is a "vague conception of shades of the dead dwelling below the earth."⁴ If one is to believe Lucretius, and there seems to be no reason why he should not be credited in this particular, the Romans were haunted by a dread of the judgment to come.

If the presence at the beginning of the historical period of practices indicative of a belief in survival, in the very people among whom the idea of immortality is said to have appeared late, is no longer a moot point, shall we hold that the kind of continuation

² J. B. Carter, *The Religious Life in Ancient Rome*, p. 72.

³ Jane Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, 1st ed., p. 11.

⁴ W. Ward Fowler, *The Religious Experience of the Roman People*, p. 386.

after death which our historians have in mind when they deny the existence of the belief in immortality at the beginning of the historical period is so different from the idea entertained by the savage that they do not take that belief into account? The present paper will show that the early conception of survival after death—let it be called the primitive conception—is, as a matter of fact, radically different from the modern conception in point of origin, of nature, and of function.

What was the nature of the primitive belief in the countries bordering the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea at the period to which it is customary to trace the rise of the belief in immortality? Let us begin with Egypt, the land of the "religion of eternal life." The oldest historical documents we possess, the inscriptions in the passages and chambers of the great pyramids, called the Pyramid texts, belong to an already complex civilization although they date back to about 3400 B. C. The glimpses of earlier belief found in these texts suffice, however, to indicate the presence of a religion of the underworld according to which the dead continued in unhappy existence under the earth. "The prehistoric Osiris faith," writes Breasted, "involved a forbidding hereafter which was dreaded." In an inscription on a stela addressed by a dead wife to her husband we read: "Oh my comrade, my husband. Cease not to eat and drink, to be drunken, to enjoy the love of women, to hold festivals. Follow thy longing by day and by night. Give care no room in thy heart. For the West Land (a domain of the dead) is a land of sleep and darkness, a dwelling-place wherein those who are there remain."⁵

The Babylonian dead were supposed to dwell in a great cave underneath the earth, the most common name of which was Arula. It "was pictured as a vast place, dark and gloomy. . . . surrounded by seven walls and strongly guarded, it was a place to which no living person could go and from which no mortal could ever depart after once entering it."⁶ For the Babylonians death made all men equal. There were no distinctions of rank in the underworld; kings, priests, conjurers, magicians, and common people, all found themselves together in the dry and dusty *kurnugea*. Everything one touched was dusty. Dust and earth were the food, the muddy water the

⁵ A. Wiedemann, *The Realms of the Egyptian Dead*, p. 28.

⁶ Morris Jastrow, *Aspects of Religious Belief and Practice in Babylonia and Assyria*, pp. 353, 356, 358.

drink of those living the shadowy life of the underworld.⁷ They lived an ineffective, drowsy, starved existence.

Sheol of the Hebrews, like the underworld of the Babylonians, was a place of dread. The shades were forgotten of God. Yahveh was the God of the living, not of the dead. "Go thy way," says Ecclesiastes, "eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart. . . . Let thy garments be always white; and let not thy head lack oil. Live joyfully with the wife thou lovest all the days of thy life of vanity. . . . for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Sheol whither thou goest."

In Greece also the souls went to the land of the dead bemoaning their lot, for it was wretched. From that dark country souls never returned. Homer draws a repulsive picture of the dead hovering in the dark realm of Acheron, hazily conscious, hollow voiced, weak, and indifferent.

Neither the Egyptians, nor the Babylonians, nor the Hebrews, nor the Greeks could, it seems, think of beings deprived of a vigorous, effective body as enjoying a happy life. The few fortunate individuals who were translated to Elysium or elsewhere without passing through death and lived on happily, had retained their body. The knowledge of the decomposition of the body after death and of the tenuous unsubstantial nature of ghostly apparitions, account naturally enough for the weakness and ineffectiveness attributed to ghosts.

For centuries this repulsive and hopeless belief oppressed the millions from among whom was to rise European civilization. A turning point had, however, been reached at the dawn of the historical period. The primitive belief was apparently doomed, for the leaders in those nations had not only felt the social danger it threatened, and had in consequence begun to deprecate as evil the cult addressed to ghosts, but they had also become clearly conscious of moral cravings, the satisfaction of which death seemed to make impossible.

Regarding the opposition that had arisen to the primitive belief, we may recall that in Israel, the religion of Yahveh was the determined enemy of the cult of the dead in all its forms. And of the Greeks we are told by Jane Harrison that "that which was in the

⁷ Friedrich Delitzsch, *Das Land ohne Heimkehr, die Gedanken der Babylonier-Assyrer über Tod und Jenseits*, p. 16. He thinks, however, that as early as the thirtieth century B. C. a distinction in the abode of the shades made its appearance. Some of them lived in peace and comfort in a country provided with water (pp. 18-22).

sixth and even in the fifth century before the Christian era the real religion of the main bulk of the (Hellenic) people, a religion not of cheerful tendance but of fear and deprecation," was the same that Plutarch centuries later, and with him most of his great contemporaries, regarded as superstition. Among the Romans, ghosts had so far lost individuality as to be regarded by modern historians as impersonal forces. The cult had become to an amazing degree a matter of mere conventional behavior.⁸ Thus a period of greatly decreased influence among the people of the primitive belief in immortality and of definite antagonism to it by the leaders had arrived.

Simultaneously with this opposition to the old belief, the consciousness of the insufficiency of this life to satisfy the cravings of the heart and the demands of conscience manifested itself in various and increasingly significant ways. One notes precursory signs: for instance, the averred translation of Menelaus to Elysium; of Ganymede to Olympus; of Parnapishtim to an earthly paradise somewhere in Mesopotamia; of Enoch, who was taken up unto his Lord; and of Elijah, who was carried in a chariot of fire by a whirlwind into Heaven. One notes also the appearance among the ancient Hebrews of Messianic hopes; in particular, of the belief in the day of Yahveh when the righteous who had descended to Sheol would arise and participate in the triumph of the nation. The faithful were to be resurrected, not in order to live a blessed, independent existence elsewhere than on this earth, but in order to be *reincorporated in the earthly life of the nation*. These were preliminary manifestations of needs which found their full expression in the modern conception of immortality.

The formation of that conception, as it took place among the Hebrews, is exceedingly interesting. Lack of space forbids anything more than a passing reference to some of the main facts. Job is an early shining instance among the Hebrews of a clear consciousness of the moral incompleteness involved in the limitation of human existence to earthly life. Yet he died without the hope of a blessed immortality. His nearest approach to it is a fleeting persuasion or hope that after death he would enjoy for a moment a vision of God, who would then vindicate his mysterious ways.

The transformation of Yahveh, the God of the nation, into a God maintaining individual converse with the members thereof, and holding each individual, and no longer the nation alone, as *morally*

⁸ W. Ward Fowler, *loc. cit.*, pp. 386-388.

responsible to him, is intimately connected with the establishment among the Jews of the modern belief in immortality. The tragic inner life of Jeremiah shows us how circumstances forced him into individual relationship with Yahveh (chapters xv-xvii). Ezekiel continued the development of Jeremiah's thought. From the existence of an individual relationship with a just God, he drew the unavoidable conclusion that each individual is to be rewarded or punished according to his desert. This new doctrine permeates the Psalms and the book of Proverbs. But when limited to earthly existence, the doctrine is obviously false. Job and the author of Ecclesiastes are up in arms against this truncated truth: "All things come alike to all, there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not; as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath." Ezekiel's doctrine could be made true only by positing another life after death in which the injustice of this life would be repaired. This has remained a chief argument of those believers in immortality who also believe in a benevolent and righteous Creator.

The conception of and the belief in a blessed future existence in which man's deepest and noblest yearnings are to be realized, followed upon the appearance of a deep sense of the worth of these cravings. Whenever, among peoples already familiar with the idea of soul or ghost, these cravings were sufficiently keenly felt, they seemed to have given rise to a belief similar to the Christian belief in immortality.

In Egypt in the religion of the sun-god, long before the book of Job was written, a glorious existence with the god had been conceived. In Greece, Plato taught a lofty doctrine of successive earthly incarnations for the gradual purification of souls from the pollution which comes to them from their association with matter. Ultimately souls entered the glorious world of pure spirits. But this doctrine did not originate with the Greek philosopher. He tells us himself that he got it from the Orphic priests. The Orphic cult was addressed to Dionysos by a sect that had evolved a definite system of religio-philosophic belief, the chief article of which was the double composition of man: one part mortal, coming from the Titans, the other divine. Man's task was to rid himself of the Titanic element, which corresponds to the body, in order to return pure to God. The deliverance of the soul could not be achieved

suddenly nor without the helping mediation of Orpheus, who, let it be noted, demanded a pure life as condition of salvation from rebirth.

The nature of the primary conception of continuation after death gives proof that, unlike the modern conception, it was not born of desires for the fulfilment in another existence of hopes frustrated on this earth. Had it had that origin, it would necessarily have been conceived of in a form designed to satisfy these desires. The nature of the belief and its universality among savages show it to have been imposed, regardless of man's feeling toward it, as irresistibly as the belief in the existence of any object present to the senses.

Differences in origin lead to differences in function. In the primary belief, the ghosts, even those of friends, are on the whole sources of anxiety and fear, and the relations maintained with them aim almost exclusively at warding off their interferences in human affairs. No one loves a ghost and, speaking generally, no one desires to become one. The modern belief is, on the contrary, a vivifying conviction or hope, calling forth the best that is in one's personality.

To consider these two conceptions as bearing to each other the relation of the seed to the fruit, is, therefore, to disregard their respective nature and function as well as their origin. In none of these respects have these conceptions anything essential in common. That is why the primary conception had to be discredited and discarded before the modern one of a glorious life, fulfilling the noblest human demands, could be formed and entertained.

STATISTICS OF CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS BELIEFS.

In Part II of my book, I attempted to discover what proportions of the members of a number of influential classes (physical scientists, biological scientists, historians, sociologists, psychologists, and college students of non-technical departments) believe in personal immortality and in the God whose existence is presupposed by all the organized religions, i. e., a God conceived of as acting upon the physical world or at least upon man, at man's request, desire, or desert. It appeared to me of great interest both practically and scientifically to find out definitely the percentages of believers, disbelievers, and doubters among these classes, and to correlate eminence in them and the special kinds of knowledge possessed by their members with these percentages.

I was aware that the statistics of belief so far gathered have little or no statistical value. When, as in the case of the extensive inquiry of the Society for Psychical Research, less than one-third of those who were solicited answered, no particular meaning attaches to the discovery that two-thirds of that one-third believe in immortality. In order to obtain statistics valid for the whole of a group, it is not necessary, it is true, to poll every member of the group. It is sufficient to consider a part of that group, provided that every member of that part or a very high percentage, answer the inquiry, and that the selection of the part investigated be made according to chance. The statistics of that part may then, according to the law of probability, be held valid for the whole group.

The statistical defect from which the inquiry of the Society for Psychical Research suffers, is often combined with an insufficient definition of the belief under investigation. Not long ago some rash person affirmed in the English press that "it is extremely doubtful whether any scientist or philosopher really holds the doctrine of a personal God." Thereupon a Mr. Tabrum collected from among English scientists 140 expressions of opinion on the question, "Is there any real conflict between the facts of science and the fundamentals of Christianity?" But the author did not define what he meant by "fundamentals," neither did he ask his correspondents to state the meaning they attached to that expression. Strange to say, very few thought it necessary to be explicit. Lord Rayleigh wrote, for instance, "I may say that in my opinion true science and true religion neither are nor could be opposed." This has the appearance of a misplaced pleasantry. Any one may make that statement; its significance depends altogether upon what is meant by "true religion." You may have in mind some conception of religion which would tolerate neither the 'Apostles' nor the Nicean creed, nor even a personal God!

In my own investigation I endeavored to avoid the two major defects illustrated above, and succeeded, I think, in establishing statistics of belief valid for the entire classes named above, so far as the United States is concerned.

The student of human development will be interested in the possibility now opened to ascertain the statistical history of religious beliefs. By instituting at some future time an investigation similar to mine, it would become possible to express with a high degree of exactness the changes that have taken place in the spread of the beliefs here considered.

If I cannot enter here into details as to the statistical method I have followed, the results secured, and their interpretation, I may at least add in conclusion the following figures and some brief information.⁹

	PHYSICAL SCIENTISTS	BIOLOGISTS	HISTORIANS	SOCIOLOGISTS	PSYCHOLOGISTS
BELIEVERS IN GOD					
Lesser Men	49.7	39.1	63.	29.2	32.1
Greater Men	34.8	16.9	32.9	19.4	13.2
BELIEVERS IN IMMORTALITY					
Lesser Men	57.1	45.1	67.6	52.2	26.9
Greater Men	40.	25.4	35.3	27.1	8.8

These figures show that in every class of persons investigated the number of believers in God is less, and in most classes very much less, than the number of non-believers, and that the number of believers in immortality is somewhat larger than in a personal God; that among the more distinguished, unbelief is very much more frequent than among the less distinguished; and finally that not only the degree of ability, but also the kind of knowledge possessed is significantly related to the rejection of these beliefs.

"The correlation shown, without exception in every one of our groups, between eminence and disbelief appears to me of momentous significance. In three of these groups (biologists, historians and psychologists) the number of believers among the men of greater distinction is only half, or less than half the number of believers among the less distinguished men. I do not see any way of avoiding the conclusion that disbelief in a personal God and in personal immortality is directly proportional to abilities making for success in the sciences in question.¹⁰

"With regard to the kinds of knowledge which favor disbelief, the figures show that the historians and the physical scientists provide the greater; and the psychologists, the sociologists and the biologists the smaller number of believers. The explanation is, I think, that psychologists, sociologists and biologists in very large numbers have come to recognize fixed orderliness in organic and psychic life, and not merely in inorganic existence; while frequently physical scientists have recognized the presence of invariable law in the inorganic world only. The belief in a personal God as defined for the purpose of our investigation is, therefore, less often pos-

⁹ These figures are percentages of the number of persons who answered the *questionnaire*.

¹⁰ Concerning these abilities and their influence, see Chapter X.

sible to students of psychic and of organic life than to physical scientists.

"The place occupied by the historians next to the physical scientists would indicate that for the present the reign of law is not so clearly revealed in the events with which history deals as in biology, economics, and psychology. A large number of historians continue to see the hand of God in human affairs. The influence, destructive of Christian beliefs, attributed in this interpretation to more intimate knowledge of organic and psychic life, appears incontrovertibly, as far as psychic life is concerned, in the remarkable fact that whereas in every other group the number of believers in immortality is greater than that in God, among the psychologists the reverse is true; the number of believers in immortality among the greater psychologists sinks to 8.8 percent.

"One may affirm, it seems, that in general the greater the ability of the psychologist, the more difficult it becomes for him to believe in the continuation of individual life after bodily death.

"The students' statistics show that young people enter college possessed of the beliefs still accepted, more or less perfunctorily, in the average home of the land, and that as their mental powers mature and their horizon widens a large percentage of them abandon the cardinal Christian beliefs. It seems probable that on leaving college, from 40 to 45 percent of the students with whom we are concerned deny or doubt the fundamental dogmas of the Christian religion. The marked decrease in belief that takes place during the later adolescent years in those who spend those years in study under the influence of persons of high culture, is a portentous indication of the fate which, according to our statistics, increased knowledge and the possession of certain capacities leading to eminence reserve to the beliefs in a personal God and in personal immortality."¹¹

To the statistical data are added a large number of letters from my correspondents and a somewhat full study of the religious ideas of students. These together with the statistics make a picture of the present religious situation both vivid and relatively exact.

J. H. LEUBA

BRYN MAWR COLLEGE.

¹¹ *The Belief in God and Immortality*, pp. 277-281.